

The hybrid contents of memory

André Sant'Anna

University of Otago

The nature of the relationship between episodic memories and the events they are about is one central point of disagreement between representational and relational views. The former holds that memory only indirectly relates to past events, being instead a direct relation to internal representations of those events inside one's head. The latter view says that past events are constitutive parts of memory, meaning that in remembering we are always directly related to those events. I suggest that this dispute can be avoided if we adopt an alternative notion of the nature of the content of memory representations. I argue that a form of "separatism" between phenomenology and content in memory is desirable, for it provides the grounds to develop an account of memorial content that is both representational and relational. This "hybrid view" of memorial content is representational in that it recognizes that memory has accuracy conditions, but is also relational in that past events are viewed as constitutive parts of memorial content.

I start by discussing the motivations behind traditional representational and relational accounts of memory and suggest that a proper view of memorial content can reconcile important aspects of those seemingly incompatible views. I proceed by drawing a parallel between this hybrid account of memorial content with hybrid accounts of perceptual content. I argue that just as hybrid accounts of perceptual content can offer insights into important epistemological, phenomenological, and metaphysical issues about perception, so can this hybrid account of memorial content offer similar insights into the same issues about memory. To draw this parallel, I focus on one prominent hybrid account of perceptual content developed by Susanna Schellenberg and show how it relies on a form of "separatism" between phenomenology and content. I argue that the case for separatism can be similarly made for memory. I proceed by discussing how Schellenberg's view can serve as a starting point to develop a hybrid account of memorial content and I show how it deals with important issues pertaining to representationalism and relationalism. I also consider some potential disanalogies between memory and perception, but suggest that they do not harm the hybrid view. I conclude the paper by offering some considerations on how the hybrid view can be helpful in contemporary debates, such as the dispute between continuism and discontinuism about memory and mental time travel and the debate about the nature of memorial objects.